

REMARKS

Claims 1 – 12 and 14 - 16 are pending. Claims 13 and 17 – 18 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. The applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of this application in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

On page 4 of the office action, dependent claim 13 was objected to, but indicated as being allowable if rewritten in independent form. Independent claim 1 has been re-written in independent form to include claim 13, and it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 as rewritten is allowable. Claim 13 was canceled. In view of the above, the applicants submit that the claim 1 and claims dependent therefrom are patentable.

The applicants have rewritten claim 1 to incorporate claim 13 since the office action indicated that claim 13 would be allowable if so re-written. However, the applicants do not concede that other features in the claims are found in the prior art. The applicants wish to clarify for the record, if necessary, that the claims have been amended to expedite prosecution.

Any narrowing amendment to the claims in the present Amendment is not to be construed as a surrender of any subject matter between the original claims and the present claims; rather this is merely an attempt at providing one or more definitions of what the applicants believe to be suitable patent protection. In addition, the present claims provide the intended scope of protection that the applicants are seeking for this application. Therefore, no estoppel should be presumed, and the applicants' claims are intended to include a scope of protection under the Doctrine of Equivalents.

Claims 1 – 2 and 17 – 18 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over US 5,816,639, Muta ("Muta") or US 6,175,179, Herve ("Herve"), further in view of JP 10-108402, Niki et al. ("Niki"). Claim 1 has been amended to incorporate allowable claim 13, and

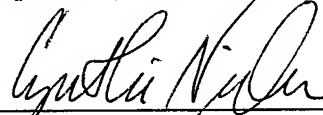
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claims 17 – 18 have been canceled. It is respectfully requested that the rejection be withdrawn and the claims be allowed.

In view of the forgoing, the applicants respectfully submit that this application is in condition for allowance. A timely notice to that effect is respectfully requested. If questions relating to patentability remain, the examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone.

Please charge any unforeseen fees that may be due to Deposit Account No. 50-1147.

Respectfully submitted,



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